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Commission on the Status of Women
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Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Statement submitted by St. Joan's International Alliance, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2011/1.

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Statement*

1. There is an elephant in the living room of our world community. It is written about in op-ed pieces in newspapers across the world. It is talked about by grass-roots groups, the educated and uneducated, across the planet.

2. It is misogyny in religion, namely Roman Catholicism. At its roots, sexism in religion underlies much of the violence in our world, especially violence against women and their children. St. Joan's International Alliance, a Catholic feminist organization, asks the members of the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women to boldly name this foundational injustice and resolutely act to correct it, even if it requires an addition to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

3. With male-only images of God, males are raised to be empowered, females disempowered. This distorted yet "protected" thinking is part of a co-dependent cycle, according to psychologists, where family, church and society shape a woman to think less of herself (low self-esteem) than males and be willing to endure abuse. Because so much of what the girl child perceives around her is presented from a male-only viewpoint, she is given that perception of herself. More often than not it is the notion that she is powerless and a sex object. Many girls see themselves in this way.

4. Moreover, the behaviours of power and control in domestic violence include not only physical and emotional abuse, but the use by males of male privilege: being the one to define men's and women's roles. The all-male hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church has defined men's and women's roles for the millions of Catholics around the world. And the Vatican's influence reaches far and wide internationally, including at the United Nations.

5. This concept is part of the domination/subordination paradigm played out on a larger scale in the constant need for security, as evidenced by enormous military budgets. The military budget of the United States of America in 2010, for example, is $864 billion. Idols have been made of war and weapons, of guns and greed.

6. How can there be peace in the twenty-first century when we have not named the oppression of women (and children) within religion as an underlying cause of the oppression of women (and children) in our world?

7. In Roman Catholicism, the male priests at the Vatican deny the priesthood to women, which negates women in leadership and decision-making roles in the Church. Girls who want to minister as priests are denied the opportunity to receive training and education, which would prepare them for full employment in the Church.

8. Religious bodies are a social aspect of human lives. Therefore, religious bodies must be held to the same accountability of respecting human rights, including the rights of the girl child and women, as are other social institutions. The consequences of Roman Catholic misogyny are enormous. The women that the Vatican fathers relegate to second-class citizenship comprise two thirds of the world's poor and most of the world's victims.

* Issued without formal editing.

9. During 2009 and 2010, members of St. Joan's International Alliance participated in the Commission on the Status of Women. The organization found that the women of its own religion, sharing its deepest moral concerns, were not adequately represented by the Holy See at the United Nations.

10. The organization's caucus for each of these years was "Religions (starting with its own) and violence against women". When religions and society collude in discrimination, women (and their children) are deprived and endangered.

11. The 1979 United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, especially articles 5 and 7, grants women equality in decision-making and in leadership of governmental bodies and non-governmental organizations.

12. St. Joan's International Alliance, which has done consistent and valuable work for the advancement of women with the United Nations (and earlier with the League of Nations), implore you to find the courage to make the connections between women's rights as human rights and how they are affected by the religious culture of each woman.